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AUTHOR Cramer, Susan; Smith, Annette
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ABSTRACT

Wisconsin has been exploring educational targets or outcomes since 1992 in conjunction with legislation mandating student assessment. While the establishment of outcomes does not necessarily indicate that a school subscribes to an outcome-based education (OBE) philosophy, the two could go together. OBE requires identification of outcomes prior to instruction, instruction related to specific outcomes, and demonstration of identified outcomes. Reaching consensus on the outcomes that are important is difficult for any school district. The relationship between the state's desired outcomes and OBE was studied in a survey completed by 42 Wisconsin school districts. Forty percent of responding districts are in the process of identifying outcomes, although only eight actually call them "outcomes." Most districts are familiar with the state's desired outcomes, but the linkage between state and district outcomes is low. Finally, the majority of districts do not consider themselves OBE. Only two call themselves OBE districts, while four say they adopt some OBE philosophy. An appendix contains the survey instrument. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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ANNETTE R. SMITH

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Outcomes and Outcome Based Education in Wisconsin

Dr. Susan Cramer
Annette Smith
College of Education and Human Services
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

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Outcomes and Outcome Based Education in Wisconsin

"Outcomes" is a word likely to capture the attention of educators and the general public. When linked with "-Based Education" (OBE), fear and furry are likely to flicker across one's eyes. When linked with North Central Association's (1994) Standard X Proposal (Section 10.02), "...each approved plan (which may reflect state developed or local models) shall emphasize student growth in identified learner outcomes" (p. 1), groans and thoughts of non-compliance may result. This study sought to ascertain the extent to which Wisconsin school districts have established learner outcomes, if the outcomes reflect the state learner outcomes, and if schools considered themselves outcome based.

Outcomes

The call for outcomes, goals, or objectives is not new in education. In the 1950's Tyler wrote about the need for teachers to tie objectives to evaluation and real life contexts. Bloom's and Mager's work on behavioral objectives in the 1960's likewise encouraged educators to specify what they were trying to accomplish during a lesson and recognize that differing levels of learning were possible and desirable. In the 1990's Spady once again reminds us that we must have goals or some idea of what is to be accomplished in the classroom prior to beginning instruction. Spady calls these goals 'outcomes' (King & Evans, 1991) and is probably the person most closely associated with the term 'outcome based education'.

Wisconsin has been exploring educational targets or outcomes since 1992 in conjunction with legislation (Wisconsin Act 269) mandating student assessment. The process followed included the drafting of a paper, Targets and Tasks, which examined "the relationship of various educational targets to one another and to educational tasks" ("History of," 1994). The framework was then shared with many educator groups and stake holders in June, July, October, and December of 1992 and March, May-June, and August of 1993 ("History of," 1994). Community hearings were also held and the proposed outcomes were published in major state newspapers. From this process a total of 17 Learner Outcomes were identified. Also identified were ten Learner Goals, ten Institutional Support Goals, and eight Societal Support Goals. "Adoption of the outcomes is strictly voluntary, but school districts may use the learner outcomes to facilitate the development of applied and integrated curricula and to demonstrate student learning" (Benson, 1994, p. 3). Furthermore, while outcomes and goals have been established, the term outcome based education is not found in associated literature.

Outcome Based Education

While the establishment of outcomes does not necessarily have to indicate a school subscribes to an outcome based education philosophy, the two could go together. An exploration of the many definitions of OBE follows along with three differing levels or 'zones' of OBE as defined by Spady.

What is OBE? Zlatos (1993) defines OBE as a

> philosophy that all children can learn, with an approach that defines clearly what students are to learn, measures their progress based on actual achievement, meets their needs through various teaching strategies, and gives them enough time and help to meet their potential (p. 26).

Mamary of the Johnson City School System describes their successful OBE program on the philosophy that "all students will learn well" (Brandt, 1994, p. 25). The Johnson City program includes instructional alignment, criterion referenced tests, and student demonstration of outcomes. Schlafly (1993) considers OBE to be a "complete change in the way children are taught, graded and graduated, kindergarten through 12th grade" (p. 1). McGhan (1994) says that OBE is a call for "students to demonstrate their mastery of a common set of requirements in varying periods of time" (p. 70). The self described fundamentalist Zitterkopf (1994) describes OBE as a school that "produces results relating primarily to predetermined curriculum and instruction. The focus is on achievement of results" (p. 76). O'Neil (1994) delineates two levels of OBE,

> at one level, OBE states that decisions about curriculum and instruction should be driven by the outcomes children should display at the end of their educational experience. At another level, policy makers increasingly talk about creating outcome-driven education 'systems' that would redefine traditional approaches to accountability (p. 6-7).

According to Spady and Marshall (1991a, b) and The High Success Network,

> OBE is a paradigm within a school or district that focuses and organizes all of the school's programs and instructional efforts around the clearly defined outcomes all students need to demonstrate when they leave school... [Included within this definition are three basic premises which include:] All students can learn and succeed; success breeds success; and schools control the conditions of success (p. 67).

While each definition carries its own unique twist, there are many similarities. Specifically, OBE requires identification of outcomes prior to instruction, instruction related to specified outcomes, and demonstration of identified outcomes.

Stating that outcomes must be identified is not difficult. Reaching consensus on which outcomes are important is an entirely different matter. Spady and colleagues offer a conceptual framework depicting three 'zones' within which OBE programs may fall. The three zones include traditional, transitional, and transformational.

The traditional zone is most commonly found in schools purporting to be outcome based. Characteristics of this zone include students working on discrete content skills and structured task performances (Spady, 1994). The outcomes are then usually demonstrated to the teacher or students within the class. Instruction and related outcomes look traditional with students working on separate subject areas such as reading, science, social studies, and mathematics and outcomes specified as goals and objectives related only to that particular subject. Within this zone the school day and calendar do not change in length or format and students are separated into classes based on age and subject. The major difference between traditional education and the traditional zone of

OBE is that outcomes are identified and communicated to students before instruction and learning related to the outcomes must be demonstrated during the evaluation phase.

In the second zone of Spady's OBE model, transitional OBE, outcomes should focus on higher order competencies and complex unstructured task performances (Spady, 1994) which are performed for an audience other than the students' peers. There continues to be a need for content area courses and structured tasks but much more student definition and conceptualization of learning projects occurs than is typically found in traditional classrooms.

Lastly, at the transformational level students would be striving to achieve outcomes involving complex role performances and life-role functioning (Spady, 1994). By graduation time students would be expected to demonstrate their ability to juggle work, family, personal interests, civic responsibilities, and continued education in the same manner that other working adults must in today's complex world. This type of OBE would be a radical departure from schooling as it currently exists as students would frequently move into the larger community to accomplish learnings associated with stated outcomes. Additionally, school calendars might involve year round educational opportunities, the school day may need to be extended into late afternoon and evening hours, and course offerings may move from the traditional school building to a floor or several rooms in a downtown office building or mall.

The Study

OBE has caused a furor heard nationwide as communities have debated, discussed, and attempted to implement OBE programs. While the state of Wisconsin does not endorse OBE, the establishment of outcomes is strongly suggested and voluntary statewide outcomes have been developed. Based on this information, the researchers designed this study to answer the following questions related to outcomes and OBE: 1) Have districts developed learner outcomes? 2) Are the learner outcomes linked to the state's Learner Outcomes? 3) Do schools consider themselves OBE?

Sample

A total of 91 surveys were sent to a systematic sample of 20% of the school districts in the state. Using a 1991-92 alphabetized list of school district administrators, every fifth name and associated district were identified for participation in this study. To ensure all geographic regions of the state were represented, selected districts were listed by CESA (Cooperative Educational Service Agency) then additional districts, a total of five located in two CESAs, were randomly selected in under-represented regions to include a minimum of five districts in each of the state's 12 CESAs. A total of 45 surveys were returned although three included insufficient data resulting in a usable response rate of 46%. Each CESA was represented by a minimum of two respondents (see table 1). School district enrollment was also examined to ensure that a mixture of small, medium,

and large districts were represented in the sample. While the majority of districts reported they had under 3,000 students, responding districts did range in size from 130 students to 18,900 students (see table 2).

Table 1
Wisconsin District Outcomes Survey Response Rate by CESA

CESA	Surveys Sent n = 91	Surveys Returned n = 45
1	12	4
2	16	6
3	6	3
4	6	3
5	7	5
6	7	5
7	6	3
8	6	2
9	5	4
10	10	4
11	5	3
12	5	3

Table 2
Wisconsin District Outcomes Survey Response Rate by Number of Students in District
n=45

Number of students in district	n
0-999	16
1,000-1,999	9
2,000-2,999	6
3,000-3,999	4
4,000-4,999	3
5,000-5,999	1
6,000-9,999	3
over 10,000	2
no response	1

Methodology

A researcher developed survey instrument (see Appendix A) was developed to collect information related to district outcomes and demographics. The instrument was shared with one senior university faculty member in an Educational Leadership program for clarity and readability, changes were made based on feedback. Surveys were mailed with a cover letter in July 1994 to district administrators in a systematic sample of 91 Wisconsin school districts. Respondents were asked to return the surveys in an enclosed, postage paid envelope, by August 3, 1994.

Findings

Study results yielded five findings. First, 40% (n=17) of the responding districts have identified or are in the process of identifying outcomes although the term outcome is used in only about half (n=8) of the districts. In districts where the term outcomes is used, three districts called them outcomes while in the remaining five districts they were called learner outcomes, exit outcomes, or program outcomes. In the remaining districts outcomes were called: expectations and learning goals, standards, concepts, performance expectations, performance based education, objectives, learner processes, learner competencies, and "nothing specific."

The development of district outcomes is a fairly recent phenomenon. Four districts indicated it was an ongoing process, while an additional eight districts indicated they were developed or most recently revised in the 1990s. Two respondents were unsure when they were developed and three indicated they were developed in the 1980's (see table 3).

Table 3
Date of Local "Outcome" Development
n=17

Year	n	Year	n
in process	4	1989	0
1994	1	1988	2
1993	3	.....	
1992	2	1984	1
1991	1	.....	
1990	1	unknown	2

Note: When more than one year was indicated for year of development, the most recent year was recorded (ie. 1985, 1990=1990).

A range of individuals (staff, parents, administration, school board, teachers, students, the community, curriculum teams, and curriculum coordinator) were involved

in the identification of district outcomes. In all districts administrators were involved and in all but one district teachers were also involved. In five districts parents and/or the community were also included and two districts included students.

Based on the question "Are you familiar with the Wisconsin Learner Outcomes?" it was found that yes, district administrators are familiar with the Wisconsin Learner Outcomes (n=40). While knowledge of state outcomes is high, linkages between state and local outcomes are low. Only four of the 17 districts with outcomes have linked them to the state framework. Furthermore, four districts which indicated they have not identified local outcomes indicated they have tied local outcomes to the state outcomes. These last four districts may simply be choosing to adopt the state framework as opposed to developing unique district outcomes thereby complying with North Central Association's Standard X.

Finally, the vast majority of districts do not consider themselves OBE. Only two districts indicated they considered themselves OBE districts while an additional four wrote that they have adopted pieces of the OBE philosophy. No further information related to OBE was shared by the respondents.

Implications

Two major implications may be drawn from the above data. First, while districts are aware of state learner outcomes, they have not necessarily developed their own outcomes nor have they linked their outcomes to the state's. Development of such outcomes is needed and linkages with the state framework should be explored. Secondly, if OBE is to become a reality in Wisconsin districts, something - the curriculum development atmosphere, community response, etc. - must change.

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Appenidx A

Wisconsin District Outcomes Survey

District Name _____ Student Enrollment _____

1. Has your district determined outcomes for students?
   Yes (Please continue with question 2)

   No If no, has your district decided not to use outcomes? Yes No
   (Please skip to question 6)

2. Do you use the word outcomes or another term?
   Outcomes _____

   Other (please specify) _____

3. Approximately when were your district's outcomes determined? _____

4. Who was involved in their development?

5. Please attach a list of your district's outcomes.

6. Are you familiar with Wisconsin's Learner Outcomes? Yes No

7. Are your district's identified outcomes tied to the Wisconsin Learner Outcomes?
   Yes No
   Comments:

8. Do you consider yourself an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) district?
   Yes No
   Comments:

Please return by August 3, 1994 to:

Dr. Susan Cramer
College of Education and Human Services
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
800 Algoma Blvd.
Oshkosh, WI 54901